

## BOOK REVIEW

PETER LOEWER. 2005. **Seeds: The Definitive Guide to Growing, History & Lore.** (ISBN 0-88192-682-5, pbk.). Timber Press Inc. 133 S.W. Second Ave, Suite 450, Portland, OR 97204-3527, U.S.A. (Orders: www.timberpress.com, mail@timberpress.com, 503-227-2878, 1-800-327-5680, 503-227-3070 fax). \$17.95, 229 pp., approx. 48 b/w illus., tables, index, 6 1/8" × 9 1/4".

*Seeds: The Definitive Guide to Growing, History & Lore* by Peter Loewer is an informative, easy to read, and entertaining book covering many topics relating to plant seeds. This book is especially useful because no botanical background is required to understand the text. Any necessary information on seed anatomy, ecological and botanical aspects is described by the author and often illustrated with black and white drawings. Mr. Loewer left no seed related topic out, including chapters on seed chemistry, plant families, flower pollination, seed longevity, dispersal, germination, the buying and selling of seeds, seed companies, seed collectors, collecting your own seed, seed diversity, and seed references galore. All topics are accompanied by a treasure trove of plant and interesting story examples.

The first few chapters cover the basics of plant families, flower pollination, seed chemistry, genetics, seed dispersal, and seed germination. The basic process of germination is described thoroughly with both text and pictures. Loewer goes into more detail in another chapter on specifics for germination such as storage, temperature, moisture, light, and a "paper towel" method of efficiently germinating seeds. A number of intriguing experiments on seed longevity are discussed including historical lore and storage recommendations for enthusiasts.

A number of chapters are devoted to the business of seeds because, after all, the business of seeds is big business. The chapter on buying and selling seed is truly eye-opening. The chapter includes a history of seed sales from Christopher Columbus and the Jamestown settlers buying staple crops to the first flower seed mail-order catalogs. In addition to the historical review of seed sales, a few seed company owners and their companies are profiled. The author also includes a chapter that introduces the reader to the many other businesses built on and around seeds; for instance businesses that make seed germinating equipment, special fungicidal seed coatings, and seed development companies.

There are a couple of chapters for the seed collector. They contain such useful information as how to collect, seed company contact information, and seed exchange information. To aid in your collection ventures, a variety of seed starting guides and informational handbooks are also recommended. A couple of extraordinary seed collectors are profiled in this chapter, Chris Chadwell of the Sino-Himalayan Plant Association for example.

The closing chapters offer guidance and suggestions to increase your success with starting seeds. The reader is taken through the process from choosing seed, seed starting medium, soil sterilization, labeling, propagation frames, seed starting conditions, seed sowing containers, lighting, emergence, hardening off and into the garden bed. The author stresses the importance of record keeping and proper labeling to help increase chances of success year after year. Also included are suggestions for starting ferns from spores.

*Seeds: The Definitive Guide to Growing, History & Lore* is a joy to read. This book is full of interesting stories, histories, examples, and useful information on learning about seeds and success with seed gardening. One of the most valuable reasons for buying this book is the large list of reference information including contact information for seed companies, exchange groups, literary resources, plant societies, and supplies. The book is recommended for anyone with an interest in seed history, lore, gardening, or how little things like seeds grow to become big business.—Lee Luckeydoe, *Herbarium, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, 509 Pecan Street, Fort Worth, TX 76102-4060, U.S.A.*